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Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference

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Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution 52/4 of 22 October 1997.

II. Consultations between representatives of the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference and representation at meetings

2. On 2 October 1997, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) held their annual coordination meeting at United Nations Headquarters to discuss the agenda of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, in particular those items of concern and interest to OIC.

3. The Secretary-General of the United Nations addressed the coordinating meeting of OIC Foreign Ministers. It was the first time that a United Nations Secretary-General had addressed such a coordinating meeting. The Secretary-General of the Arab League also addressed and took part in the meeting.

4. The coordinating meeting, which unanimously admitted Togo as the 55th member State of OIC, reviewed the international situation, with specific attention to the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Jammu and Kashmir; Afghanistan; Somalia; the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan; the consequences of Iraq's occupation of Kuwait; and the situation pertaining to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Security Council resolutions 731 (1992) and 883 (1993). The coordinating meeting also discussed the issue of United Nations reform. In response to an invitation from OIC, senior representatives of the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat attended the meeting.

5. The Secretary-General of the United Nations attended the Eighth OIC Summit, which was held at Tehran from 9 to 11 December 1997. During the Summit, the Secretary-General conferred with a number of heads of delegation and other senior participants in the Summit, including OIC Secretary-General Dr. Azeddine Laraki, as well as the new Chairman of OIC, President Seyed Mohammad Khatami of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

6. At the twenty-fifth meeting of Foreign Ministers of OIC, which was convened at Doha from 15 to 19 March 1998, the Secretary-General was represented by his Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi.

7. During the period under review, cooperation on political matters intensified between the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, in particular with regard to ongoing peacemaking efforts. Regular consultations were held, and information was exchanged between the secretariats of the United Nations and OIC, including on the situations in Somalia and Tajikistan. Regarding the peace process in Tajikistan, it should be recalled that OIC participated as an observer in the United Nations-sponsored inter-Tajik talks that were concluded in 1997 with the signing of the General Agreement. OIC is a member of the contact group established in connection with the peace process in Tajikistan.

8. A new dimension of cooperation between the United Nations and OIC was added concerning the conflict in Afghanistan. Following the twenty-fifth OIC Foreign Ministers meeting, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Mr. Brahimi, and the Permanent Observer of OIC to the United Nations, Ambassador Mokhtar Lamani, conducted a joint United Nations/OIC peacemaking mission to Afghanistan and a number of neighbouring countries. This mission, which lasted from 20 March to 15 April 1998, was followed by a series of meetings of the Afghan parties, held at Islamabad under joint United Nations and OIC auspices from 26 April to 3 May 1998. Despite the inconclusive ending of these talks, the co-chairmanship by the two organizations underlined the valuable potential of concrete joint cooperation in the field of peacemaking, which could be applied beyond the conflict in Afghanistan.

9. On 28 and 29 July 1998, the Secretary-General of the United Nations convened a high-level meeting of regional organizations (including OIC) with which the United Nations has cooperated in preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping. The agenda of this third meeting with regional organizations focused on the topic of early warning and conflict prevention in the twenty-first century, as well as the capabilities of the United Nations and regional organizations in the field of early warning and conflict prevention. It was agreed during this two-day meeting that cooperation in this field between the United Nations and regional organizations, including OIC, will continue at the working level. An appropriate follow-up meeting is already envisaged to take place later in 1998, in which OIC is expected to take part.

III. General meeting of the United Nations system and the Organization of the Islamic Conference and its specialized institutions

10. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/4 of 22 October 1997, a general meeting on cooperation between representatives of the secretariats of the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized institutions was held at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 13 to 15 July 1998. Substantive preparations for this meeting were initiated by the coordinating secretariats of the United Nations and OIC. In accordance with the agreement between the coordinating secretariats, the meeting adopted the following agenda at its opening session:

1. Organization of work.
2. Review of cooperation in the political dimension.
3. Review of cooperation and appraisal of progress achieved in priority areas of cooperation:
   (a) Development of science and technology;
   (b) Trade and development;
   (c) Technical cooperation among Islamic countries;
   (d) Assistance to refugees;
   (e) Food security and agriculture;
   (f) Education and eradication of illiteracy;
   (g) Investment mechanisms and joint ventures;
   (h) Human resources development;
   (i) Environment;
   (j) Development of arts and crafts and promotion of heritage.
4. Consideration of proposals for enhancing the mechanisms of cooperation between the United Nations system and OIC and its institutions.
5. Other matters.
6. Adoption of the final report.

11. The meeting had before it working papers prepared by the participating organizations, agencies and institutions of the two organizations. The 10 issues listed under agenda item 3 of the general meeting, "Review of cooperation and appraisal achieved in priority areas of cooperation", constitute the agreed priority areas of cooperation between the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized agencies. During the general meeting, which was held concurrently with a meeting of focal points established for the priority areas, informal working groups composed of representatives of the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized institutions were established. Based on the discussions in these working groups, which centred around the working papers prepared by the two organizations, the general meeting, *inter alia*, reached agreement on a wide-ranging programme of cooperative activities to be accomplished in the period 1998–1999. The conclusions and recommendations of the meeting were contained in its final report, which was unanimously adopted on 15 July 1998 (copies of the final report were made available and distributed to all participants from the United Nations and OIC immediately after the last session of the general meeting on 15 July 1998).

12. Representatives of the following departments of the United Nations and other organizations and bodies of the United Nations system participated in the meeting: Department of Economic and Social Affairs; Department of Political Affairs; Department of Public Information; International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); International Labour Organization (ILO); International Telecommunication Union; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); United Nations Industrial Development Organization; United Nations Institute for Training and Research; United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); World Bank; World Food Programme.

13. Representatives of the following organizations and institutions of OIC participated in the meeting: Department of Economic Affairs; Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT); Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO); Islamic Institute of Technology (IIT); Islamic Solidarity Fund (ISF); Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI); OIC general secretariat; Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA); Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRTCIC).

14. The increased political cooperation between the United Nations and OIC was also confirmed during the general meeting. The heads of the United Nations and OIC delegations attending the general meeting conducted a wide-ranging and substantive exchange of views about

cooperation in the field of preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution. The discussion was held on the basis of a working paper prepared by the OIC secretariat. There was broad agreement on the value of regular political consultations between the two organizations, including at the level of Secretary-General. It was noted that OIC was planning to participate in the third meeting between the United Nations and a number of regional organizations scheduled for 28 and 29 July 1998 at United Nations Headquarters.

15. During the meeting, the OIC Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Ibrahim Bakr, expressed appreciation for the enhanced level of cooperation in the political field, especially regarding the peace process in Afghanistan, in which OIC and the United Nations have undertaken a number of common initiatives. It was agreed that the United Nations and OIC would continue to cooperate closely in the search for peace in Afghanistan. The discussion also included exchanges of views on the topics of Palestine, Tajikistan, Somalia, Jammu and Kashmir, Armenia-Azerbaijan, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Kosovo. There was broad satisfaction about the prospects of further cooperation in the political field, and both sides were looking forward to the next round of regular consultations in New York in early October 1998.

IV. Follow-up action on recommendations of the meetings between the United Nations system and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, including cooperation in the field of economic and social development

16. Outlined below is a summary of contributions received for the present report from entities of the United Nations system.

A. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

17. During the period June 1997–May 1998, FAO continued its cooperation with some of the specialized and affiliated institutions of OIC, namely the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), SESRTCIC, ISESCO and ICDT. Cooperation between FAO and these OIC institutions focused on areas of common interest, such as rural development and food security, training in agricultural policy analysis, and the trade of fish products.

18. The FAO Director-General attended the Eighth OIC Summit held at Tehran from 9 to 11 December 1997.

B. International Fund for Agricultural Development

19. The collaboration between IFAD and OIC was formalized in 1983 through a cooperation agreement in which the two organizations pledged to exchange information and conduct periodic consultations to promote joint programmes related to agricultural development and rural poverty alleviation. The working partnership has taken many forms. Of the 51 members of OIC, 47 are also members of IFAD. They play a key role in framing the Fund's policies and priorities, make up over 40 per cent of all IFAD borrowers and have been, for a total of US$ 880.6 million, major contributors to the Fund's resources. In addition, co-financing has been provided by IDB for 14 projects in 11 Islamic countries and by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund in six countries and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) in eight. Technical assistance grants totalling US$ 34.5 million have supported applied research in fields of particular relevance to many Islamic countries, while IFAD-initiated workshops and seminars have facilitated the exchange of information and ideas between OIC countries and the Fund.

20. IFAD-designed and -supported projects in Islamic countries have taken a variety of forms, although all share the Fund's basic approach: targeting resources to the most vulnerable of the rural poor, promoting the active participation of the people in their own development and striving to set the foundations for sustainable development. A number have focused on pastoral management and conservation of rangelands, sustainable patterns of land and water resources use, combating environmental degradation and assistance to drought-displaced persons. As the focus is determined by local conditions and the needs of particular target groups, so are the means employed. These include credit for investment in productive on- and off-farm enterprises, better access to improved technologies, services and training in more effective farm and range practices, and strengthening the capacity of national and local institutions to serve the rural poor.

C. International Labour Organization

21. The relations between the ILO and OIC date from 1980, and have been further strengthened since the inception of general consultations between the United Nations system and OIC in 1993. ILO supports national development efforts of individual OIC member States through its technical assistance programme. It maintains close working relations with pertinent regional and subregional organizations, such as the League for Arab States, the Arab Labour Organization and the Executive Bureau of the Council of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States. ILO participates in the annual meetings of the Board of Governors of the Islamic Development Bank. The organization also attaches great importance to the promotion of cooperation and the exchange of information.

D. United Nations Children's Fund

22. In pursuance of the 1989 cooperation agreement between OIC and UNICEF and the 1996 memorandum of understanding signed between ISESCO and UNICEF, children's issues continue to retain high visibility on the political agenda in the Islamic world. This manifested itself amply during the eighth OIC Summit at Tehran in December 1997, at which UNICEF conducted its advocacy at the apex level.

23. Reaffirming the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children, the two organizations, including the subsidiary organization ISESCO, rededicated their efforts to ensure the survival, protection and well-being of children in the Islamic world, and adopted a resolution on child care and protection in the Islamic world.

24. In calling for a ministerial meeting to be convened on the subject, the OIC Summit reiterated its commitment to child care and child rights in Islam. At the country level, member States of OIC translate global commitments through in-country programmes and projects, in fulfilment of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Year 2000 goals. In addition, ISESCO and UNICEF will be meeting in 1998 to determine cooperation with respect to projects relating to children with disabilities and girls' education.

25. Meaningful implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and national plans of action by all OIC member States still remain a challenge. This can be achieved through the sharing of information, technical resources, success stories and the harmonization of national laws with the articles and provisions of the Convention.

E. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

26. UNESCO has continued its cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and its specialized institutions, notably ISESCO. UNESCO participated in the biennial general meeting between the United Nations system and the OIC system, which was held at Geneva from 13 to 15 July 1998. UNESCO is the focal point for the United Nations on two of the priority areas agreed upon, namely education and the eradication of illiteracy, and human resources development.

27. UNESCO continued, through the period under review, to refine the modalities of cooperation with the OIC system and to expand the areas of cooperation. Exchange of information and visits between programme specialists and frequent contacts at the highest level gave a particular impetus to cooperation between UNESCO and the OIC system, in particular ISESCO. The Joint UNESCO/ISESCO Committee held its fifth session in Paris from 23 to 26 March 1998, and elaborated a programme of activities for 1998–1999. The programme was signed by the two Directors-General in Paris on 17 July 1998. The programme, which includes about 80 jointly financed and executed projects, went beyond the priority areas mentioned above to include science and technology, culture and communication, as well as cooperation in the preparation and convening of major UNESCO conferences on higher education (1998), vocational training (1999), science (1999) and communication (2000), and on transdisciplinary programmes, such as the culture of peace.

28. On 19 February 1998, the UNESCO Director-General and the Secretary-General of OIC signed a special agreement between the two organizations on assistance to the Palestinian People and on safeguarding the cultural heritage of Jerusalem. UNESCO continued to cooperate with IRCICA and other subsidiary bodies of OIC, and to provide assistance to OIC member States through UNESCO participation programme.

F. United Nations Environment Programme

29. Since the signing of the memorandum of understanding with OIC and the cooperation agreement with ISESCO in 1990 and 1996, respectively, UNEP cooperation with OIC

has progressed in several areas of mutual interest. UNEP attended the General Conference of ISESCO (Riyadh, 6–9 December 1997) and the twenty-first session of the Islamic Commission for Economic, Social and Cultural Affairs (Jeddah, 9–13 January 1998).

30. A UNEP/ISESCO training of trainers workshop on environmental education was held in Bahrain (12–19 October 1997) with participation from 10 Arab, Asian and African Islamic countries. The Workshop focused on the introduction of environmental education into the educational programmes in these countries, and reviewed and appraised the countries' experiences in emphasizing the Islamic perspective in environmental education.

31. Furthermore, a series of three topical seminars and a conference on the theme "Environment and Islam: towards an ethical environmental charter" was proposed by UNEP, and is being pursued as a joint UNEP/ISESCO initiative supported by the Islamic Development Bank and the Faysal Islamic Bank. The first preparatory meeting for this activity was convened in Bahrain on 10 December 1997, and the proposal is now being circulated to other Islamic institutions and potential donors for support. UNEP considers this activity an extremely important event aiming at building environmental protection work on the basis of the spiritual and cultural values of the Islamic world.

G. United Nations Population Fund

32. As in the past and in accordance with its mandate, UNFPA has continued to provide technical assistance to most member States of the OIC in which population programmes and activities were funded. In addition, UNFPA has continued to cooperate with OIC through the funding of joint activities with ISESCO. In 1996, further to signing a cooperation agreement with ISESCO, UNFPA approved a project in the approximate amount of $194,000 to strengthen population education in ISESCO's action plan and enhance the capacity of its member States to advocate gender, reproductive health and reproductive rights issues. Within the framework of this project, two symposiums, one on the theme "Muslim women's education" and the other on the theme "Human rights and reproductive rights in Islam" were held at Al-Azhar University in June and November 1997, respectively. Both symposiums benefited from the technical assistance of the Amman-based UNFPA country support team.

33. For future cooperation, it was agreed at the last United Nations/OIC general meeting at Geneva (13–15 July 1998) that UNFPA will continue to work with OIC institutions in support of population and reproductive health activities to advance the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action in the Muslim world. This would be done through workshops, conferences, symposiums, expert meetings, printing and translation of relevant materials.

H. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

34. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to maintain a cooperative working relationship with OIC. UNRWA benefits from the ongoing support of OIC for its efforts to provide essential services and humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees. Cooperation between UNRWA and OIC is reinforced by meetings between representatives of the two organizations, including with the Commissioner-General of UNRWA. The Agency plans to deepen contact with the OIC secretariat and with the Islamic Development Bank, *inter alia*, by regularly providing information on Agency activities.

35. UNRWA has long-standing working relationships with a number of OIC member States, in particular the Governments of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, where the Agency is engaged in extensive operations to provide services to 2.1 million Palestine refugees. Those Governments, as well as the Governments of Turkey and the Arab Republic of Egypt, are members of UNRWA's Advisory Commission. UNRWA has also established a close working relationship with the Palestinian Authority in respect of services provided to the 1.3 million Palestine refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

36. UNRWA continues to benefit from the support of OIC member States to the Agency's regular budget and special assistance programmes. Since the relocation of Agency headquarters to the area of operations in July 1996, the Commissioner-General has paid official visits to several OIC member States in the Gulf region and South-East Asia, including Bahrain, Brunei Darussalam, Kuwait, Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

I. World Meteorological Organization

37. A number of technical assistance projects were and are being implemented in OIC member States and areas such as Algeria, Chad, Gaza and the West Bank, Guinea-Bissau, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Mali, Morocco,

the Niger, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. These projects are financed through different schemes, particularly UNDP and trust fund arrangements. Most of these projects are aimed at promoting sustainable development through the provision of meteorological and hydrological services to agriculture, water resources management and protection of the environment.

38. In addition, a number of consultancy missions financed through UNDP and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Voluntary Cooperation Programme (VCP) were organized in a number of member countries in Africa, Asia and the Arab States. Fellowships were awarded in the fields of meteorology and hydrology to a number of trainees in OIC members and financed through WMO-VCP and the regular budget, in particular in Palestine. Within the framework of WMO-VCP, equipment, expert services, spare parts and consumables were provided to national meteorological services of 10 OIC members during the reporting period.

J. Other departments and organizations of the United Nations system

39. A number of departments and organizations of the United Nations system, including the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), conveyed information to the United Nations Secretariat on their programmes and activities in cooperation with OIC and its specialized institutions.